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HOW MANY BREAKDOWNS FOR EVERY BREAKTHROUGH?

MASHINES,
NONPOLITICS

BREAKTHROUGH, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, GUATTARI, REVOLUTION, SUBJECT GROUPS, WAR
MACHINE

Ultimately, one escapes from the structuralist impasse by recognizing that an effect of meaning only has repercussions at the level of the signified in so far as potentialities of subjective action are liberated, once there is a breach in the signifier..The machinic breakthrough, waiting, masked by the structure, is the subject in aspic, so to say, time at the ready. – Guattari, 'Causality, Subjectivity and History'

What are the underlying set of concerns that renders consistent the various interviews and essays throughout *Psychoanalysis and Transversality*? What was the unifying thread that ran throughout all that preoccupied Guattari between the years of 1955-1971? Confronted with questions such as these, one is immediately signaled to an inquiry already underway; a search for the relevant experiences and conditions under which Guattari practiced analysis while also furthering his activist work. And the promise of this seemingly naive and biographical question is that of understanding what convinced Guattari to treat psychotherapeutic practice and revolutionary politics as inherently, and thus necessarily, implicated with each other? Biography, however, only establishes the scope of such a question. As Deleuze would aptly remarked:

a militant political activist and psychoanalyst just so happen to meet in the same person, and instead of each minding his own business, they ceaselessly communicate, interfere with one another, and get mixed up—each mistaking himself for the other.. Pierre-Félix Guattari does not let problems of the unity of the Self preoccupy him. (Deleuze, 'Three Group-Related Problems')

The thesis we will put forward is the following: Guattari views psychotherapeutic practice and revolutionary politics as two distinct yet necessarily related endeavors since each is concerned with, and oriented toward, resolving a singular problem: *What should one do when stuck in a situation?* (Guattari, *Psychoanalysis and Transversality*, 73). In other words, schizoanalysis and revolutionary politics address themselves to those phenomena, which act as an impasse to the freedom of both desire as well as social life. Hence Guattari explains that

[T]he little subject clinging to its mother, or the dazed schizo..are entirely connected to this being. The subject is engaged with it and, paradoxically, it is only along the way that everything becomes blocked. This entire neurotic ball makes it so that at one point..there is longer any possibility of reconnecting, of being articulated with anything that is not fantasy. The problem is to dig

a few new holes artificially so that it can reconnect somewhere. Recourse to absolute alterity is something that, in principle, should allow it to remain connected to the foundation of all value. (Psychoanalysis and Transversality, 74-75)

Now, with respect to institutional psychotherapy, the methodological starting point is still the one offered by psychoanalysis: “to know how to arrive at being a subject under these conditions. What does he or she have to do to continue being a speaking subject and to speak efficiently?” – where the ‘conditions’ Guattari is referring to is one of blockage, aporia, and impasse where “signifiers...are *blocked* as significations such that a singular individual cannot express him or herself in it.” (PT, 68-69). In cases such as these, institutional psychotherapy locates the ‘subject’ not in the face to face meeting but in that place where they “have remained prisoner” Hence the necessity for constructing diagrams, whose function is to bring the subject in relation with the ‘Outside’ (alterity) – for it is this need of constructing diagrams that becomes all the more urgent for the subject’s liberation from that which renders it unable to express themselves. In other words, a therapeutic method based on the construction of diagrams maintains, for the subject, the very possibility of achieving a real separation between itself and what is essentially an aporia of the unconscious: “A factory, an asylum, or a patient, they stink...You have to look for something. The first item on the agenda is to open up to the complete alterity of the situation.” (PT, 73).

Subject-Groups, Subjugated-Groups, and Group Phantasies

With respect to the concerns of politics and questions surrounding the organization of a properly revolutionary subject, we once again encounter the same problem. As Guattari puts it,

the revolutionary organization has become separated from the signifier of the working class's discourse, and become instead closed in upon itself and antagonistic to any expression of subjectivity on the part of the various wholes and groups. The subject groups spoken of by Marx. Group subjectivity can then express itself only by way of phantasy-making, which channels it off into the sphere of the imaginary. To be a worker, to be a young person, automatically means sharing a particular kind of (mostly inadequate) group phantasy. To be a militant worker, a militant revolutionary, means escaping from the imaginary world and becoming connected to the real texture of an organization, part of the prolongation of an open formalization of the historical process. (Psychoanalysis and Transversality, 218-219)

So, just as it is with therapeutic practices one of the fundamental problems encountered in politics – i.e. how to realize a form of collective antagonism that avoids the trap of dogmatism, thereby leading to the ossification and curtailment of what is revolutionary within a certain organization. And these problems also take the form of blockages (of signifiers that translate into the silence of individuals) and are seen in those moments when some members of a group begin to speak for the group as a whole. Or, in the worst of cases, blockage develops into a fascistic mode of organization structured according to (i) the groups identification with a single image/signifier (Phallus) such as the leader; (ii) the foreclosure of any individual's unconscious existence which leads to the substitution of the “I” for a generic, and impersonal, “we”; and (iii) the organizations *group phantasy* becomes increasingly insular, closed off from any relation to difference, and thus ultimately reinforces and demands the collective denial of individual and collective finitude. And with this final characteristic – a group's denial of the finitude of its organization – we arrive at what is at work in what Guattari calls the ‘misunderstanding’ expressed phenomena such as racism, nationalism, and sexism:

...the great leaders of history were people who served as something on which to hang society's phantasies. When Jojo, Hitler, tells people to “be Jojos” or “be Hitlers,” they are not speaking so much as circulating a particular kind of image to be used in the group: “Through that particular Jojo we shall find ourselves.” But who actually says this? The whole point is that no one says it, because if one were to say it to oneself, it would be something different. At the level of the group's phantasy structure we no longer find language operating in this way, setting up an “I” and an other through words and a system of signification. There is, to start with, a kind of solidification, a setting into a mass; this is us, and other people are different, and usually not worth bothering with—there is no communication possible. There is territorialization of phantasy, an imagining of the group as a body, that absorbs subjectivity into itself. From this there flow all the phenomena of misunderstanding, racism, regionalism, nationalism and other archaisms that have utterly defeated the understanding of social theorists. (Psychoanalysis and Transversality, 223)

And it is precisely in light of this always present threat of fascisms resurgence (from the right and within the left) that Guattari proposes the distinction of **subject-groups** and **subjugated-groups**. To separate *subject-* from *subjugated-*groups, however, must be understood as an analytic distinction integral to schizoanalysis as method of analyzing the potentiality of the unconscious relations and habits sustaining one, or many, individuals, which allow them “to continue being a speaking subject and to speak effectively?” (PT, 69). By formally distinguishing subject-group and subjugated-group, Guattari's main priority is determining whether the subject as ineluctably bound to a highly particular set of behaviors, ways of speaking, etc., repeats its existence in a manner that saves and/or liberates elements of the unconscious that may harbor the possibility of lines of flight within the unconscious from its reduction to ‘the repressed territories’ of the Ego:

The loss of consistency of a component will not have been followed...by a chain reaction of new inhibitions. It will instead have served as a sensitive plate, as a developer, as an alarm bell. But of what exactly? That is precisely the question! To which, actually, it is best not to answer too quickly. As there is perhaps no answer to it, strictly speaking. An a-signifying sign—the

restriction on vocal performances—makes the halt of something without forbidding...that other things intervene. Great! This is already something! Certain paths marked out for a long time: singing, the moralizing surcoding of the mother, are experiencing a pragmatic transformation. Should these facts be considered liabilities and put down in record in the column of lacks a deficits: Nothing is less certain! But nothing is determined either! . . . It must be clear that all transference induction...could have devastating effects, or, at the very least, bring us back to the depressive tableau which is “normally” expected under such circumstances. It seems less risky to me to think about the material qualities of this component of expression...Is it because of the presence of such a “luxurious” component that the song did not allow a preventative alarm to be raised and to suggest a bifurcation? From then on what was called to vegetate under the guise of inhibition was transformed into the beginning of a singularization process. (Guattari, ‘The Schizoanalyses’)

What is clarified with this example is that subject-groups and subjugated-groups, rather than corresponding to two discrete sets of individuals, corresponds to (and seeks to identify) the moments when a given subject finds itself in a relation with elements that offer an alternative to what Guattari views as the norm in Freudian and Lacanian analysis (i.e. a reductive treatment of the unconscious that continuously makes recourse to the Oedipal relation or the general linguistic structure underlying the whole of unconscious life). At this juncture what can be said with certainty is that, contrary to an analysis of desire in terms of its Oedipal or linguistic overdetermination, schizoanalysis aims to develop an analysis of desire where desire (or the subject, or the unconscious) functions as the guide and agent of analysis as such. In this way, then, to employ schizoanalysis with individuals and within and among groups is tantamount to constituting, within an individual or a group, “the conditions of an analysis of desire” that results in “analysis and desire finally on the same side, with desire taking the lead.” (Deleuze, ‘Three Group Related Problems’). Thus, we could say that what is at stake in schizoanalysis is the development of an analysis that returns desire to potentially liberatory elements, which have been deemed “irrelevant” or “meaningless” from the vantage point of Oedipal relations or linguistic structures.

And with respect to the social life within certain ‘militant’ or political organizations, Guattari identifies the same problem: where do we find the subject with respect to politics and under what conditions is it no longer able to creatively express itself? (218-19). In other words, how does the political subject free itself from structural impasses? (220-222). Just as the analyst takes recourse to alterity, so too must collective subjectivity develop the tools to ward off closing in on itself (through domatism or structuring group phantasy around a sign that assumes a Phallic function), policing its members (dictating, from above, legitimate and prohibited forms of speech, activity, etc.), and substituting a focus on how to identify and interpret, for itself, the unconscious traps that continuously hinder its expression. And it is this latter phenomena that obliges groups to develop their own “transitional phantasies” or “transition objects,” whose function within the group is to liberate collective desire from grounding itself upon the dogmatic images of organization inherited from historical communism and the history of the workers movement. That said, one is still right to ask as to whether or not this development of transitional phantasies within subject-groups is simultaneously a sufficient reason for Guattari’s belief regarding the inherent link between psychotherapeutic practice and the concerns of (revolutionary) politics?

Breakthrough or Breakdown?

Just as he identifies the reductive work of psychoanalysis to be insufficient regarding the therapeutic aim of establishing, for the subject (i.e. the unconscious), a relation to a future that does not conform or repeat the structure of its past, so too does Guattari identify analogously reductive relations that inhibit the revolutionary potential of Leftist groups and organizations (e.g. the Party, the military, State, Capital). For Guattari, and with respect to Leftist institutions as historic as that of the Party-form and its mass organizations (union, youth organizations, women’s organizations, etc.), these forms have proven themselves to be an equally effective instrument of capitalist and state repression; achieved in large part by the alignment of workers’ desire with the interests of Capital as well as the Party’s collusion with bourgeois parties and the State in identifying and policing elements within the workers movement that continuously break with the Party line:

The demand for revolution is not essentially or exclusively at the level of consumer goods; it is directed equally to taking account of desire. Revolutionary theory, to the extent that it keeps its demands solely at the level of increasing people’s means of consumption, indirectly reinforces an attitude of passivity on the part of the working class. A communist society must be designed not with reference to consumption, but to the desire and the goals of mankind. The philosophic [sic] rationalism that dominates all the expressions of the workers’ movement like a super-ego fosters the resurgence of the old myths of paradise in another world, and the promise of a narcissistic fusion with the absolute. Communist parties are by way of having scientific “knowledge” of how to create a form of organization that would satisfy the basic needs of all individuals. What a false claim! There can be social planning in terms of organizing production...but it cannot claim to be able to give a priori answers in terms of the desire objectives of individuals and subject groups. (Guattari, ‘The Group and The Person’)

Moreover, says Guattari, it is only when groups undertake a schizoanalysis of itself that it can then develop “transitional phantasies” or “transition objects,” whose function within the group is to: “channel the action of imagination between one structure and another...To move from one representation of oneself to another, though it may involve crises, of at least retains continuity” (‘The Group and The Person’, 229). More concretely, and as Guattari would argue with respect to the Italian State’s juridical and spectacular charges brought against Negri and the Red Brigades: “Violence is legitimate when it is the work of workers, women, and youths who are struggling to change their condition. It is no longer legitimate when it is only carried out by

dogmatic groupuscules whose principal target...is the impact of their action on the media" (Guattari, 'An Open Letter To Some Italian Friends'). Hence, Guattari writes:

Capitalism has only managed to consolidate those very bastions that the RAF and the Red Brigades claim too shake, insofar as it has managed to develop a majority consensus founded on social ultra-conservatism, the protection of acquired advantages and the systematic misinterpretation of anything that falls outside of corporate or national interests. And whatever works toward the isolation of individuals, whatever reinforces their feelings of impotence, whatever makes them feel guilty and dependent on the state, on collective agencies and their extensions...feed this consensus. To claim to lead a revolutionary movement without attacking these phenomena of mass manipulation is an absurdity. While the secret war conducted by the industrial powers along the north-south axis to keep the Third World is now indeed the main issue, it should not make us forget that there is another north-south axis which encircles the globe and along which conflicts of an equally essential nature are played out, involved the powers of the state and oppressed nationalities, immigrant workers, the unemployed, the "marginals," the "nonguaranteed" and the "standardized" wage earners, the people of the cities and of the barrios, of the favelas, the ghettos [sic], the shanty-towns, engaging the opposition of races, sexes, classes, age-groups, etc. To conduct this other war, to insure its social and mental control over the whole everyday, desiring world, capitalism mobilizes tremendous forces. To ignore this kind of opposition or to consider it of secondary importance is to condemn all other forms of social struggle led by the traditional Workers' Movement to impotence or reappropriation. Like it or not, in today's world, violence and the media work hand in glove. And when a revolutionary group plays the game of the most reactionary media, the game of collective guilt, then it has been mistaken: mistaken in its target, mistaken in its method, mistaken in its strategy, mistaken in its theory, mistaken in its dreams... (Guattari, 'Like the Echo of a Collective Melancholia,' 110-11)

Thus, it is for this reason that Deleuze will go on to claim, in his foreword to the text, that Guattari's project has always been "about grasping that point of *rupture* where, precisely, political economy and libidinal economy are *one and the same*" (PT, 17) and that schizoanalysis refuses the misleading assumption that the problem of the Left is that of choosing between spontaneity and centralism, or between guerilla and generalized warfare: *Guattari's strength consists in showing that the problem is not at all about choosing between spontaneity and centralism. Nor between guerilla and generalized warfare. It serves no purpose to recognize in one breath the right to spontaneity during a first stage, if it means in the next breath demanding the necessity of centralization for a second stage: the theory of stages is the ruin of every revolutionary movement. From the start we have to be more centralist than the centralists. Clearly, a revolutionary machine cannot remain satisfied with local and occasional struggles: it has to be at the same time super-centralize and super-desiring. The problem, therefore, concerns the nature of unification, which must function in a transversal way, through multiplicity, and not in a vertical way...In the first place, this means that any unification must be the unification of a war-machine and not a State apparatus (a red Army stops being a war-machine to the extent that it becomes a more or less important cog in a State apparatus)* ('Three Group-Related Problems,' 15-16).

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